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## THE WORK OF THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL IN SUPERVISION

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ROGER A. SPENCER

Principal, Whitney School, Rochester, New York

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### THE DUTIES OF THE PRINCIPAL ARE THREEFOLD

The school principal in a city system has a threefold task. In the first place, the administrative and clerical work required by the central administration always requires a large amount of time and energy. These responsibilities include pay-rolls, monthly, annual, and special reports, plans for organization, transfers to and from other schools, cases for the attendance officer and, in addition, reports and samples of work required by general supervisors. Since the World War began, this work has increased and includes the sale of Thrift Stamps and contributions to War and Community Chests with the necessity of handling and accounting for money thus raised. It is important that principals attend to such matters promptly in order that each school may be an efficient unit in a well co-ordinated school system.

There is likewise much clerical and administrative work in handling the school itself. Rooms must be properly heated, lighted, ventilated, and cleaned. Special cases of discipline must be handled by the principal. This includes all cases that for one reason or another the teacher is unable to deal with satisfactorily, and all cases of a general character which arise on the grounds or in the building. Pupils must be classified and assigned to teachers. It is also frequently necessary to reclassify pupils on the basis of their ability in order that the interests of the pupils and the school may be served most effectively. Programs must be arranged for special subjects not taught by the regular teacher. Schedules must be arranged for general and special supervisors in order that they may not be delayed in their work and at the same time may not upset the work of the various rooms more than is necessary. The principal must see that a sufficient amount of suitable supplementary materials is furnished in order that instruction may be as effective as possible. In systems which do not furnish free text-

books and supplies, many schools in poor districts encounter serious difficulties in securing such materials. The internal organization of an elementary school along the lines mentioned above is a matter of large importance. If these matters are neglected, the efficiency of the school is seriously endangered.

In a large school it is necessary to ask teachers to do a certain amount of clerical work if all the records and reports required are handed in on time. The teacher with thirty-five or forty lively youngsters in her room finds it necessary to cut down the time required for this sort of work to a minimum. She has no choice but to do so. The principal on the other hand often lets routine matters absorb his attention to such an extent that he fails to give adequate attention to the significant problems of instruction.

The live, earnest, resourceful principal who is a student of education and who has a broad, comprehensive vision of the important work for which his school primarily exists will not be satisfied to be buried alive by office detail and administrative problems. Neither will he be satisfied with following out some purely mechanical plan of supervision, however definite and simple it might make his work. He will not be satisfied with anything less than the educational leadership of his school. This phase of a principal's work is the most important of his varied responsibilities. It is the purpose of this paper to describe in some detail several supervisory problems which must be adequately handled by the principal in his efforts to improve the quality of the instruction in his school.

#### THE PRINCIPAL MUST HAVE THE CONFIDENCE OF HIS TEACHERS

Confidence is based on mutual understanding, sympathy, and honesty of purpose. The principal must recognize that his teachers are intelligent, that they are people of ability, that their judgment is valuable, and that their highest hope is for happiness in their work and success in carrying it through. He must also recognize that their interest is not limited to their own particular rooms but that it extends to the success of all undertakings of the entire school. The principal will get confidence in the proportion that he gives it. The spirit of co-operation must manifest itself on the part of teachers and principals alike. It means a high morale for the entire force without which failure to reach any advanced position is almost certain. Teachers should not feel that they do not dare to go to the principal to offer suggestions. The principal should

not give the impression that he is conscious of, and jealous of, his authority. Personal elements must be kept far in the background. No individual's mind works freely in an antagonistic, unfriendly, or critical atmosphere. The teacher must feel that any question can be discussed with the principal on its merits.

The lack of this feeling of freedom is noticeable in some schools. One day a teacher came to the principal of her school and suggested that the halls were noisy outside her room and that she thought a different plan was needed for handling pupils who were necessarily passing through the corridors. The principal simply said, "Have I asked you for any suggestions?" She of course replied in the negative. Then he said in sharp, cutting tones, "You manage your own room and when I want you to help run the school I will let you know," and dismissed her. The teacher was naturally hurt and disheartened and as a result she worked far less effectively than she otherwise would have done. Had he told her in a kindly way what the problem was, that he had found no way of improving it, and that he would be very glad if she could make any suggestions which would help matters, the results might have been entirely different. Even had it been necessary to point out to her just why the suggestions she made were impractical she would have gone back to her work better satisfied than she had been and her value to the school would have increased as a result. The principal must realize that the task confronting his school is so big that he needs a great deal of help if it is to be accomplished and that the only people who know that problem well enough to be of assistance are his co-workers, the teachers of his school.

#### HE MUST STUDY HIS COMMUNITY

Each community has its own characteristics. A high-grade American community presents certain problems to its school officers and teachers which differ widely from those presented by a foreign community. The good American school has children from homes where much is done for their education outside of school. These children usually have a fair knowledge of the use of English and also have rather extensive vocabularies when they enter the kindergarten. During their school life they usually have outside training in music and dancing and also learn much through the books and magazines which they have at home. They are often able to spend a few weeks in the country or at some lakeside in summer so that

they become more or less familiar with domestic animals and life in the country around which so much of their early reading is organized. The family car contributes much to the education of these children inasmuch as it enables them to come in touch often with the country and with many interesting places.

The children on the other hand who attend the school in foreign districts come from homes where little or no English is spoken. They have acquired language habits distinctly different from those used in school. They have seldom seen books or papers in any language and the idea of reading has never assumed valuable proportions in their experience. They have seldom been outside the city where they live and frequently they have not been outside the neighborhood where they were born. They have no English vocabulary except such as they may have picked up from their playmates on the street or from an older brother or sister already in school. This lack of vocabulary presents serious problems throughout the grades. Teachers must use the simplest English and must avoid any word which has not been very carefully taught or they will not succeed in making themselves understood. This was brought home to the writer very forcibly in connection with the examinations sent out from the central office to the schools of Rochester last June. One question on an eighth-grade English examination will serve to illustrate the point. The question read: "Name four books which you have read this semester." Nearly every pupil in our eighth grade failed on that question because their teachers had never used the word "semester." It is a word so much less frequently used than the word "term" that it was not understood. Our children failed, not in ability to answer the question, but because they could not understand the question.

A large amount of oral language work must be done with the children of foreign parentage in the early years of their school work in order to give them even a fair speaking vocabulary. No amount of word drill alone will accomplish this purpose. It must come through stories, language games, and dramatization. This is a very difficult problem, especially where many of the children inherit a poor or mediocre mentality. It is impossible in the limited space of this article to discuss adequately all of the problems which children from foreign homes present to their schools. The difference in the problems which confront teachers of American

children on the one hand, and foreign children on the other hand may be compared to the difference in the problems of contractors who find a rock foundation upon which to raise their structures and of contractors who find much quicksand on the site upon which they are to build. The former can start out confidently at once, but the latter may find months of work in pumping out quicksand and in putting concrete in its place before the structure can safely appear above ground. The foregoing reference to the needs of children in foreign sections of our cities is but one illustration of many community problems to which a principal and his teachers must give serious consideration.

#### DEFINITE PLANS OF WORK ARE NECESSARY AND IMPORTANT

In a school in a foreign district, means must be devised for overcoming the obstacles of language and lack of proper home environment. From the very day the children enter the kindergarten the school must work to give them the concepts they will need later in the work of the grades. This will continue as a problem into the primary grades and with the slow child it will persist much longer. This point may be illustrated as follows: The writer is a principal of a school in an Italian community. With these children it is quite easy to do more or less abstract mechanical school work, but it is very difficult to teach these children to read intelligently. We have been obliged to devise a very comprehensive kindergarten-primary plan of work to overcome this difficulty. One detail of the plan will be sufficient here to indicate what the writer has in mind by the term, "plan of work." Practically all the primers use animals as the basis of their reading lessons. The Italian children, however, come to school with little or no familiarity with either domestic or wild animals. It is therefore necessary, if current primers are to be used, to build up concepts of animals before reading begins.

The following description illustrates the method of dealing with this problem in our school. We divide our children according to ability and designate the grades in order as 1 B<sup>1</sup>, 1 B<sup>2</sup>, etc. An experienced teacher with a 1 B<sup>4</sup> grade has taken much interest in working on the problem of concepts of animals. She used pictures showing various views of the same animals and then secured celluloid models of the various animals such as the dog, cow, elephant, tiger, lion, etc. She used extensive language- and sense-training

games in which these celluloid animals were handled and discussed by the children. In presenting the matter of relative size, she encountered serious difficulties. In fact, she has found no way as yet of teaching it effectively. In order to test her results after seventeen weeks, she took her pupils to see a big circus parade. The children called out the names of the various animals which had been taught in class, but they did not seem to notice the others. Their surprise at finding that the animals varied so much in size was illustrated when they saw the elephants. They called out, "See the elephants! Oh! Aren't they big?" Aside from the idea of relative sizes, the methods employed by the teacher were fairly successful. In addition to teaching these concepts, a large amount of valuable language work was accomplished. This alone would have justified the time spent. Methods for overcoming other difficulties have been attacked along similar lines.

In the American school the problem is different. Progress is more rapid. Children come to school with well-developed concepts and vocabularies. The opportunity for such a school to extend its work beyond the ordinary requirement is very great. It requires the same careful planning as in the school in a foreign section but of a different type and for a different purpose. The difficulty is not one of bringing the children up to a fair standard; it is rather one of devising work in excess of the course of study which will take advantage of the ability of the children and will be of such a nature as to enlist their interest and enthusiasm. A plan used in School No. 23, Rochester, New York, illustrates this point admirably. During the past year assemblies were arranged which were given over to the songs, dances, and folk-lore of various countries. The writer visited an "Irish assembly." The program consisted of Irish songs and dances and Irish fairy stories. This program was carefully prepared and gave an opportunity for the natural and cultivated talents of the children to find expression.

At another time the writer visited an eighth-grade literature class in the same school. The book being studied was *The Talisman* and was being handled by means of pantomime. Different children who were able to organize a pantomime were allowed to do so and the child who worked one out was in charge during its presentation. The others not in the act knew nothing of what it was intended to portray except that it was taken from *The Talis-*

*man*. After each act the children not taking part were asked to tell where in the story the scene occurred and to tell what each character and act was intended to portray. The interest was intense during the entire hour. This work called for the best these children could give.

The plans for any school which are developed through the co-operation of teachers and principal should include all phases of the work not definitely prescribed in the course of study. In Rochester, New York, at the present time, there is no prescribed basal primary reader. A minimum course in phonics is prescribed and the ideals and aims of the work in reading are stated, but each school is allowed to choose within reasonable limitations the series of readers which it proposes to use. This necessitates a plan for primary reading in order that the school may be able to explain and defend its choice of readers. For instance, in the school of which the writer is principal *The Story Hour* readers were chosen. They are based on the Mother Goose rhymes. This enables us to get a start in the kindergarten with the vocabulary our children will need in first grade. Ninety-eight per cent of our kindergarten children are from Italian homes. For the most part these people came from Sicily and southern Italy and are very deficient in native equipment and training. The Mother Goose rhymes prove attractive to these children and the adopted readers, supplemented by others like *Story Steps* and Free and Treadwell, which are of much the same type, provide excellent materials around which we can build our language work. Many schools use other readers. Some teachers still believe in a large amount of phonetic drill which is provided in some of these readers. Whatever books are selected each school should be prepared to state clearly why such a choice has been made, and what is to be accomplished through their use. Many similar examples might be cited to show how a school must have specific plans for meeting its problems.

#### CO-OPERATION IS NECESSARY

In working out a general plan for handling the particular school problem of any community, the principal will need the co-operation of at least a few of his most capable teachers. They can be of great assistance in the study and investigation of numerous problems. As soon as a given plan has been tested and adopted for further use, the principal should explain it in numerous personal



and group conferences in order that it may be clearly understood. The teachers should then be encouraged to try the plan, to make suggestions, and finally to adopt or reject it on its merits. In this way the details of the plan will be worked out and modified from time to time as ideas develop and results are checked up.

It was in this way that our kindergarten-primary plan of work was developed. Various schemes were devised, tested, discussed, and often slightly modified, and sometimes rejected as not accomplishing the desired end. Any teacher working in this department felt free to come into the office at any time and offer suggestions or criticisms. Sometimes some teacher would get discouraged and would feel that the difficulties were too great. It frequently happened, however, that after a conference she would return to her work on the following morning with renewed enthusiasm and determination. It has been the writer's experience in this connection that if teachers are encouraged to make suggestions which fit into, or improve, the general plan of work and are allowed freedom in working out their individual plans, they are not likely to be disturbed by the idea that they are mere cogs in the machinery of the school.

#### TEACHERS MUST THINK FREELY

One of the greatest tasks that usually confronts a principal is that of overcoming the tendency on the part of his teachers to be mechanical in their work. Unfortunately this tendency to be mechanical is too often a peculiarity of the principal. The cure for this difficulty is to arouse interest in the opportunities and problems all around them. Often the writer has heard a principal classify a teacher as "superior" because she was strong in discipline and always had her reports in on time. These are desirable qualities to be sure, but if her strength lies in the mechanical side of her work, her pupils will not make rapid progress toward genuine education. It is fundamental and important that a principal and his teachers be active and energetic in their consideration of educational problems, for methods of supervising a school which do not arouse the interest of the teachers in studying and in building themselves up professionally are fundamentally weak and result in a tremendous loss to the children.

Perhaps what is implied under the term "mechanical" should be more clearly defined. The term as used here applies to the

teacher who specializes in penmanship, abstract work in arithmetic, spelling, drill in phonics and answers to assigned questions, instead of teaching children how to read intelligently, to study effectively, and to reason clearly. No one should get the idea that the writer does not regard good handwriting, accurate spelling, and quickness and accuracy in the fundamental processes of arithmetic as important, but he does not believe that school work is in any measure largely confined to this field. The children must be trained to think, to reason, and to judge, if the most important results are to be accomplished.

#### TEACHERS IN SERVICE MUST BE TRAINED

Another vital problem which the principal must solve for his school is how to develop young teachers who are of necessity assigned to his school from time to time. It is impossible for any system to secure well-developed teachers for all its vacancies. The available teachers must be drawn upon in filling vacancies. While teachers just out of the training schools are often bright, alert, and ambitious, they are in no sense efficient teachers, except in rare instances. Their whole future depends on the opportunity which is provided for their development. One of the greatest tests of the ability of any principal is his success in bringing out all the latent powers of young teachers. If the school is thoroughly alive to its problems and has the right atmosphere, these girls will work under such interest and enthusiasm that often those who at first give but little promise will develop into excellent teachers.

An ideal school in which to develop young teachers must possess all of the characteristics previously described in this article. The spirit of co-operation in a school will bring to the aid of new teachers, not only the experience and assistance of the principal, but also a group of experienced teachers willing and anxious to help them. They will get many words of encouragement and numerous suggestions from these teachers which will prove a great source of inspiration.

It is hard to say where a majority of teachers who fail are weak. With the teacher of good general ability her difficulty usually lies at some one point and this can often be overcome. It is frequently lack of daily preparation, poor organization of routine, lack of industry, or lack of self-reliance. If a teacher fails because of lack of general intelligence, lack of sincerity, or lack of sympathy with

children, her case is almost hopeless. In most cases of this type she has chosen the wrong field of work.

A weak teacher may often be helped by visiting other rooms where she can see how another teacher handles problems similar to her own. Then, too, the visits of the principal who is able to analyze her difficulties and who can afterwards discuss her problems with her and suggest means of improving her work is a great source of help. It is also important that she be encouraged to read books and articles along the line of work which she is doing in order that she may gradually acquire more information and a broader perspective of the task she has in hand. The writer has often asked a teacher of experience to keep in touch with some young teacher who is doing the same grade of work and to discuss her problems with her whenever suitable opportunity offered. This has been an excellent plan in this school which happens to have a number of most excellent teachers of experience and fine professional attitude.

In the more intimate work of supervision the principal needs to visit his classrooms frequently. He needs to have some sort of scheme to prevent his falling into the habit of dropping into the rooms nearest the office frequently and failing to visit those farthest away. Owing to the pressure of administrative work, this tendency is difficult to resist.

The person experienced in supervision has a sense which tells him almost instantly when he steps into a classroom whether or not all is well. But this is not sufficient. He must study the conditions under which the teacher is working and carefully analyze the difficulties she is experiencing. Classroom management, for illustration, is a thing seldom considered in a scientific way. Much time is wasted in having a single child walk to the front of the room to read a short paragraph or make a brief recitation. Time is also wasted when the teacher stops to test an individual child on a long list of sounds or number combinations while the remaining children of the class are allowed to lose interest and relax. The best teacher that the writer knows manages to secure such information in regard to her children without stopping the work of the class. The teacher who never fails to have something for all her children to do, who has a definite plan for handling her routine, and who does not waste time, seldom has trouble with discipline.

Within reasonable limits the immediate control of the room and its procedure belongs absolutely to the teacher. Seldom is a principal justified in taking the class out of the teacher's hands to show her how to manage it. However, it is a very unusual teacher who is not glad to discuss these questions with the principal provided he has been able to analyze the situation to the point where he can put his finger on the definite thing that is causing the difficulty.

The personal conference between the principal and teacher furnishes a splendid opportunity to discuss questions of method. The principal must avoid being dogmatic or unduly critical in these conferences and must have a helpful, friendly attitude or he will defeat the very end for which he is working. Occasionally it becomes necessary, when all other means have apparently failed, to tell her frankly in a personal conference her shortcomings and to insist that there be an entire change in certain respects within a reasonable time. That, however, is a last resort, and unless handled with great tact will tend to destroy the most effective atmosphere of the school.

When it can be employed, the standard test is the best means of eliminating poor methods and poor work. It is objective and its results can be discussed in an impersonal way. By using the standard tests the principal avoids basing his criticism on his personal, unsupported judgment. The explanation frequently given by a teacher whose work is under question, to herself and her friends, is that the principal has taken a dislike to her. Undoubtedly she sometimes believes that this is true and sometimes it may be the case, but the standard test removes the doubt that her work is questioned because of some personal whim of the principal and not because her work is really below the standard which might reasonably be expected.

A small volume entitled *The Observation of Teaching* by C. R. Maxwell, of the State Normal School at Whitewater, Wisconsin, which appeared recently can be used by supervisors to distinct advantage. While not written from the standpoint of the principal, it contains many valuable suggestions on classroom supervision. The person unable to analyze a situation accurately ought never to be assigned to the work of supervision. However good his mental equipment may be in other directions, he can do but

little to justify his assignment if he is unable to determine the good and poor points in teaching. In school work power of analysis is one of the determining factors of the worth of an individual. Few principals and teachers have this power to any marked degree.

There must be a great, inspiring vision of the purpose, problems, aims, and possibilities of his school in the mind of the principal. He must have an abiding interest in his work. He must have all the great virtues of patience, forbearance, charity, and hope of the future. He must have a warm human interest and he must be a student. He must be able to inspire others with his ideas and ideals. In the last analysis the writer firmly believes that it is the inspiration which the principal is able to furnish to his co-workers that determines in a large measure the character and success of his school.